Tips and Insight on the Disposal of Fish Waste

Background: Began with a question on whether or not regulation prohibits certain means of fish waste disposal. What resulted was a compilation of disposal methods and good enough to share information for future reference by any ECC faced with the need to dispose of fish waste.

Regulation: Fish waste from fish cleaning stations or from unexpected fish kills is a Solid Waste. Federal, state and local solid waste regulations will apply.

Disposal Methods: Following are methods currently in use that may be applicable to your situation.

- Fish cleaning stations are set up so that the waste goes into a garbage bag. The garbage bag has several holes in it to allow the liquid to flow through to the septic tank. Obviously, the trick here is to get the holes just right so the liquid goes through and the solids don't. On more than one occasion we have had plugged septic lines. The solid waste then goes off to the dump with the other solid waste generated at the facility.

- Some states allow fish cleaning waste to be returned to the lake or stream from which it came. This is convenient when cleaning stations are on docks on the water and the waste goes directly from a cleaning sink to the lake. Turtles, other fish, etc actually do a good job of keeping the waste from being a problem. B**e sure to check your state;** Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas are some states that allow this method.
- Process fish cleaning waste through a grinder into a septic tank and then to a lateral field.
- Since most of our projects are in rural areas, we usually hire someone to pump out the fish waste and these contractors spread it on farmland.
- If there is a large fish kill, special state permission can be sought to bury the dead fish in a trench. State regulatory agency may dictate specific requirements, such as trench depth, cover thickness, replacement vegetation, etc.

Considerations:

Fish waste materials are a significant source of nutrients. Fish waste would represent a significant biological oxygen demand loading if dumped in waterways or reservoirs with dissolved oxygen problems. With high flows and no pre-existing dissolved oxygen problem, this may not be a concern. At low flows or at reservoir projects with dissolved oxygen problems this may impact compliance with water quality standards. Coordination with the water quality subject matter expert is recommended.